

**SUBSTANTIVE RELIGIOUS REPRESENTATION IN UK
PARLIAMENT: EXAMINING PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS
FOR WRITTEN ANSWERS, 1997-2012**

Journal:	<i>Parliamentary Affairs</i>
Manuscript ID:	Draft
Manuscript Type:	Original Article
Keywords:	representation, legislative studies, British politics, religion , minority studies

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Abstract

The substantive representation of minority groups in national legislatures is a topic of significant normative, theoretical and empirical importance. Addressing this question, this article focuses on what drives Members of the UK House of Commons to raise issues on concern for Jewish and Muslim minority groups in relatively low-cost parliamentary activity, i.e. Parliamentary Questions for written answers (WPQs).

Drawing on the suggested positive relationship between descriptive and substantive minority representation (e.g., Hansard, 2009a), it uses content and statistical analysis to examine if having a Jewish or Muslim background impacts on the frequency and the probability of MPs' engagement with minority issues, and how this effect compares to that from institutional predictors, namely the party parliamentary status and the minority presence in a constituency. The findings demonstrate that a religious minority background has a limited impact on MPs' engagement with minority issues in WPQs, being inferior to that of institutional predictors. Being in Opposition, in particular, has a consistent, positive influence on the content of WPQs, whereby Opposition MPs table more WPQs on the issues of minority concern than Members from the party of Government.

Keywords: British politics, minority studies, religion and politics, representation, parliamentary studies

Improving the political representation of marginalised groups increases the quality of democracy and contributes to the well-being of a diverse, modern democracy by enhancing political participation and reducing socio-political exclusion (Pitkin, 1967; Saward, 2011).

Better parliamentary representation of under-represented groups such as religious minorities, in particular, ensures the accountability of politicians and improves the awareness of the political elite about society's details, views and attitudes (Hansard, 2009a).

This has been a particularly salient issue in the United Kingdom in response to the changing structure of the population and the growing influence of minority groups on British politics (Heath *et al.*, 2013). The main political institutions have successfully increased the number of minority parliamentarians through positive action and incorporated migrant-origin, ethnic and religious minorities into the British political system (Hansard, 2009a, 51; Hansard, 2013).

However, it is unclear whether these efforts have improved the substantive representation of minority interests, which depends on the performance of minority MPs and their ability to deliver expertise and insights on minority issues, rather than simply their presence in the Chamber (Dovi, 2007). The 2010 Ethnic Minority British Election Study suggests that although minority parliamentary presence has increased, the quality of representation of minority interests, or at least the public perception of it, leaves much room for improvement. It shows that minority groups feel as unrepresented by the main parties as they did in 1997, with more than 20% of respondents suggesting that a minority-specific political party is needed to deal with minority-specific problems effectively (Heath *et al.*, 2013, p. 95).

In attempting to solve this puzzle and contribute to the political representation literature, this article examines the parliamentary performance of minority MPs, namely Members of Parliament from Jewish and Muslim backgrounds, and their engagement with the issues of concern for their respective minority groups in Parliamentary Questions for written answers (WPs) tabled between 1997 and 2012. It looks at whether MPs from religious minority

backgrounds provide first-hand expertise and insights on minority issues and improve the quality of substantive minority representation by contributing to the effectiveness of policies and legislation aimed at minority groups.

The paper tests the effect from having a religious minority background on the probability and frequency of asking Parliamentary Questions on the topic of interest to the respective minority groups. It, then, compares this effect to that of institutional predictors, such as being in Opposition or representing a constituency with a substantial minority presence. The results of the analysis demonstrate that a religious minority background has a limited impact as a predictor of asking minority-specific WPQs, whereas institutional predictors, especially being in Opposition have a consistently strong, positive effect on raising the issues of minority concern in WPQs. This paints tabling WPQs as a partisan activity, which is primarily affected by the dichotomy between the Government and the Opposition and that outweighs such identity predictors as a religious minority background, despite the relatively low-cost of tabling WPQs, for one's career.

I. Previous research and research design

1.1 Previous research

Previous studies of women and ethnic minority representation use the parliamentary behaviour of MPs from these groups to examine the quality of their substantive parliamentary representation (e.g., Childs and Withey, 2006; Saalfeld and Kyriakopoulou, 2011; Saalfeld and Bischof, 2013). This article adds a new research case to this literature and expands the scope of representation and parliamentary behaviour studies to religious minority groups.

The relevance of studying the impact of religion on parliamentary behaviour and representation is supported by previous observations relating to the effects of religion on aspects of British political behaviour, such as voter preferences, turnout, and party

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3 identification (e.g., McAndrew and Voas, 2010; Voas *et al.*, 2002). However, the impact of
4
5 religious background on parliamentary behaviour and political representation is substantively
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7 under-researched. This study aims to bridge this gap and examine whether having a certain
8
9 religious background influences the parliamentary behaviour of MPs and their engagement
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11 with minority issues.
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14 The article focuses on the effect of religious minority background on the behaviour of MPs
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16 from Jewish and Muslim backgrounds, drawing upon the similarities of their origins and
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18 common histories of political engagement. The operationalisation of a 'religious minority
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20 background' is, therefore, based on socio-cultural aspects of religion (not on the spiritual
21
22 beliefs or practices associated with it), namely a socio-cultural code shared and/or
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24 experienced by politicians from minority backgrounds as a result of their parental heritage
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26 and/or upbringing (Sinno, 2008). They stem from their long history of discrimination on the
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28 grounds of religion and struggle for equal political and civil rights in Britain (Liedtke and
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30 Wendehorst, 1999), as well as the disadvantaged status of the British Jewry and Muslims in
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32 British politics and their self-perception as marginalised (or oppressed) groups (Young,
33
34 2004). There are also common points of interest (though not necessarily shared views) for
35
36 Jewish and Muslim minorities because of similarities in their regions of origin (i.e. the
37
38 Middle East), socio-cultural norms, and the impact of their religious practices on everyday
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40 life, especially in the case of orthodox faith communities.
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45 In addition to broadening the scope of representation studies and introducing a new research
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47 case, the article contributes to the methodology of legislative studies by combining methods
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49 of relational computer-aided content analysis of publicly available Parliamentary Questions
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51 for written answers with regression analyses performed on time-series cross-sectional data
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53 (using a self-constructed dataset including textual and biographical data of MPs). By
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55 allowing to hypothesise and empirically examine causal relationships between the content of
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WPQs and other texts produced by MPs and biographical and electoral characteristics of the Members, this approach enable future empirical research in the area of legislative studies.

Parliamentary Questions for written answers (WPQs) – alongside the electoral and personal characteristics of MPs – are the main source of data and a proxy for measuring the substantive representation of Jewish and Muslim minorities in the House of Commons. As a low-cost form of parliamentary behaviour, WPQs are tabled under loosened party discipline. They are more likely to reflect MPs’ individual identities and, therefore, to be affected by religious background (Franklin and Norton, 1993; Wiberg, 1995). Furthermore, Parliamentary Questions have proven useful for the study of women and ethnic minority representation, as they provide MPs from under-represented groups with a means of raising issues of concern for their respective group without risking their parliamentary careers (e.g., Bird, 2005; Saalfeld, 2011; Saalfeld and Bischof, 2013; Saalfeld and Kyriakopoulou, 2011).

In the legislative context, WPQs’ main function is to scrutinise the Government’s legislation and policies (Cabinet Office, 2010; Hansard, 1997; Hansard, 2012a). Parliamentary Questions help hold ministers and the Government to account, scrutinise the Government’s policies and actions, assist in getting hard-to-obtain information, as well as with publicising the concerns of backbench MPs and their constituencies (Franklin and Norton, 1993). WPQs enable MPs to raise specific issues, including those of concern to religious minorities. In this capacity, they are important for interest groups such as faith-based NGOs, religious or community bodies. This makes WPQs a useful source of data for examining the parliamentary representation of other under-represented groups, and a valuable source of data on MPs’ engagement with identity issues (e.g., Bird, 2005; Saalfeld, 2011; Saalfeld and Bischof, 2013).

Unlike previous studies that examine the impacts of gender and ethnicity on WPQs using contextual keywords-in-text content analysis (Bird, 2005; Saalfeld and Bischof, 2013;

Saalfeld and Kyriakopoulou, 2011), this article applies a relational, dictionary-based technique of content analysis to identify and count references to minority issues by WPQ. This has proven to be more effective in grasping abstract concepts such as ‘faith’, ‘identity’, etc. in the context of policy documents and parliamentary speeches, and in maintaining a high degree of rigor without losing significant details when operating with large amounts of text (Krippendorff, 2004; Laver and Garry, 2000).

1.2 Hypotheses

The primary hypothesis is based on the argument that if the presence of minority MPs in the House improves the quality of substantive minority representation, then minority MPs are expected to engage with issues of minority concern, at least through activities in which the cost of such engagement for one’s political career is relatively low.¹

Therefore, H₁ reads: Members of Parliament from Jewish and/or Muslim minority backgrounds are more likely to raise issues of concern for their minority groups in WPQs and/or to refer to these issues more frequently than MPs from a different religious background.

If this hypothesis is supported, then the statistical coefficients will show a positive relationship between having a Jewish or Muslim background and the frequency and/or likelihood of referring to issues of concern for the respective minority group in the WPQs tabled by Jewish and Muslim MPs. It is also expected that the relationship between having a non-minority background and the frequency and/or likelihood of referring to minority issues in WPQs will be significantly lower compared with minority Members. If the analyses support these expectations, then Jewish and/or Muslim Members are more likely to engage

¹ See Table 1 for the number of WPQs tabled by MPs from Jewish, Muslim and non-minority backgrounds.

with the issues of interest for their respective minority groups, or to do so more frequently in WPQs, which indicates that religious minority MPs disproportionately represent the concerns of their respective minority groups.

If, on the other hand, the analyses do not support this hypothesis, then minority MPs are not significantly affected by their religious minority backgrounds in their parliamentary behaviour, but could instead be affected by institutional factors stemming from MPs' duties and responsibilities, as well as their commitments to their parliamentary constituencies.

The latter is examined by considering for the relationship between the proportions of Jewish/Muslim population in MPs' constituencies and the frequency and probability of MPs tabling WPQs on the issues of concern for British Muslims and Jews. Given the strong constituency focus of British MPs, representing a constituency with a substantial minority population could encourage minority MPs to engage with the interests of the respective minority group even when his/her religious minority background does not have any effect on such engagement (Andre *et al.*, 2014). This argument forms the backbone of H₂:

H₂: MPs who represent constituencies with a significant proportion of Jewish and/or Muslim population are more likely to raise issues of concern for, respectively, Jewish and Muslim minorities in WPQs and/or to do so more frequently than MPs who represent constituencies without a significant presence of these minorities.

If the hypothesis is supported, then there is a positive relationship between representing the 'minority' type constituency and the frequency and/or the likelihood of referring to minority issues in WPQs. Representing a 'non-minority' type constituency, on the other hand, is not expected to have statistically significant effects on the frequency and/or likelihood of raising minority issues in WPQs.

For the purpose of the analysis, the constituencies represented by the MPs in the sample are categorised as 'minority' seats to indicate the areas more densely populated by Jews and

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2
3 Muslims compared to the country's average, and 'non-minority' seats. The types of
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5 constituencies are defined on the basis of the community-affiliated election and media
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7 campaigns (e.g., The Jewish Chronicle's Election 2010 and the Muslim Council of Britain's
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9 Muslim Vote) and the proportion of minority population recorded in the 2001 and 2011
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11 Censuses (ONS 2003; ONS 2012). Overall, the MPs representing 'minority' seats tabled
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13 16,962 WPQs in 1997-2012, whereas the Members for 'non-minority' constituencies tabled
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15 37,161 questions (Table 1), which despite of a skew provides enough data and variation to
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17 test the hypothesis.
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21 This study also examines the effects from the institutional predictors stemming from the
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23 MPs' party affiliation and their parliamentary duties captured by their party parliamentary
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25 status whilst controlling for their legislative roles.²
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28 The party parliamentary status, in particular, influences the content of WPQs because of the
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30 nature and purpose of WPQs as a tool for holding the Government to account, and probing
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32 ministers on the Government's legislation and policies, which is shaped by the dichotomy
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34 between the Government and the Opposition (Norton, 1993, p. 195). Given that WPQs ensure
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36 the accountability of the Government and enable MPs to scrutinise its decisions, being in
37
38 Opposition or Government is expected to affect the number and content of WPQs. MPs from
39
40 the Opposition parties, in particular, ask more questions than those on the Government
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42 benches. This is confirmed by the 1997-2012 'Questions Books' that shows that 38,883 were
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48 ² Although there is evidence that backbenchers tend to engage in low-cost parliamentary activities more than
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50 MPs in leadership roles, because they have fewer formal duties and responsibilities and are not bound by the
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52 Ministerial Code of Conduct (Searing, 1994). However, in this case, both backbenchers and MPs in leadership
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54 roles from the Opposition parties use WPQs to scrutinise the Government's policies and legislation and holding
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56 the Executive accountable (Franklin and Norton 1993). That is why this study controls for the effect of a
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58 legislative role, although there is no reason to expect an effect from this predictor on the content of WPQs.
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3 tabled by Opposition MPs compared to 15,240 questions tabled by Members from the party
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5 of Government (Table 1).
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8 The prominence of the Iraq war, immigration and community cohesion in the public and
9
10 political discourse affected the content of parliamentary debates and the pressure on the
11
12 Labour Governments in the early 2000s (e.g., Ipsos Mori, 2005; Migration Observatory,
13
14 2011). This encouraged members of the Opposition parties to be more vocal on these issues
15
16 that triggered strong reaction from British Jewish and Muslim communities. That is why
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18 Members of the Opposition parties table more WPQs, especially between 2001 and 2010
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20 when much of the debate focused on UK's involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, immigration
21
22 and multiculturalism policies and regulations and counter-terrorism following the London
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24 bombing in July 2005. Conversely, the Government tries to maintain the integrity of the party
25
26 and refrain from interrogating the ministers on sensitive topics, including minority issues.
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28 This is expressed in H₃:
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32 H₃: Opposition MPs are more likely to raise issues of concern for Jewish and Muslim
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34 minorities in WPQs and/or to do so more frequently than MPs from the party of Government.
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36 If the hypothesis is supported by the analysis, then there is a positive relationship between
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38 being in Opposition and the frequency and/or likelihood of MPs' referring to minority issues
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40 in WPQs. In this event, being in Opposition stimulates Members to interrogate the
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42 Government ministers on policies and legislation in general, and so stimulates the discussion
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44 of minority issues as well. MPs from the Government party, with the exception of some
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46 backbenchers, avoid the discussion of sensitive topics that can undermine party integrity and
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48 the Government's work.
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1.3 Data

WPQs are collected from the publicly available ‘Question Books’ (Hansard, 1998-2012). As the questions are stored in html format by sitting day, the G3 Split software is used to split them into separate questions, each saved as a separate text file suitable for reading in content analysis software (G3 Split, undated). In total, 708,429 WPQs tabled during the 1997-98 and 2010-12 sessions are coded for the study (Table 1). However, the analysis is conducted only on the questions tabled by the MPs in the sample. The WPQs tabled by the MPs are identified and isolated using the QDA Miner content analysis software by the forename and surname of an MP (Provalis Research, undated).

The sample includes all 38 Jewish and 11 Muslim politicians elected to the House of Commons between 1997 and 2012, who are identified on the basis of their self-perception, upbringing and parental heritage (Janner and Taylor, 2008; Hansard, 2013). Additionally, a control group of 25 non-minority MPs is selected using stratified random sampling. It includes the following characteristics of MPs: (1) white ethnic background, (2) Christian or secular religious background, (3) representing ‘minority’ and ‘non-minority’, and (4) being elected from the Labour, Conservative or Liberal Democrat parties between 1997 and 2012. In order to mirror the structure of the minority MPs sample, the control group includes a proportional number of parliamentarians elected from the main parties, including 13 Labour, ten Conservative, and two Liberal Democrat non-minority MPs.

Overall, 54,123 WPQs are used for the analysis. This includes 39,877 WPQs tabled by MPs from a Jewish background and 2,398 by Members from a Muslim background, along with 11,848 questions asked by the control group of non-minority MPs (Table 1).

The WPQs data is merged with the biographical and political characteristics of the MPs in the sample collected from Parliament’s profiles. The data include such political characteristics of Jewish and Muslim MPs as their party affiliation, types of seats and candidacies by election,

as well as their personal characteristics, including age, gender, ethnicity, country of origin, pre-parliamentary political experience, and educational and socio-economic backgrounds. The biographical and political characteristics of the Members are used to enrich the exploratory potential of the study and to extend its explanatory scope, although not only the most relevant ones are included in formal statistical models.

1.4 Methods of analysis

The analysis is conducted in two stages. First, a relational computer-aided dictionary-based content analysis is performed on the selected Parliamentary Questions. This research considers only WPQs because the majority of questions are tabled for written answers, and even oral questions are usually given written answers because of time constraints (Blackburn *et al.*, 2003, p. 374; Hansard, 2010a). Using WPQs, therefore, increases the number of data units and allows for higher variation between them. Secondly, WPQs are longer and more detailed than questions for oral answers. This makes them more useful for quantitative content analysis and the qualitative, exploratory study, which helps to contextualise the findings (Saalfeld, 2011). The limitations of the data stem from the relative brevity of WPQs compared to other types of parliamentary contributions and their conformity with ‘the existing parliamentary conventions regarding courteous language’ (Hansard, 2010a, p. 3). However, their brevity is compensated for by their high frequency that allows for robust topical analysis and shifts of interest to particular issues among MPs.

The WPQs are tested against the keywords that operationalise the notion of ‘minority issues’, including community issues (British Jewry and British Muslims), foreign affairs (South Asia and the Middle East), and immigration, using the Yoshikoder content analysis software.³

³ Over 1,100 indicators are used to operationalise and test for the presence of Jewish and Muslim minority-specific issues in WPQs that are grouped into the following categories: ‘British Jewry’, ‘Middle East’, ‘British

The output of the quantitative computer-aided content analysis provides values for continuous and dichotomised dependent variables – ‘British Jewry’, ‘British Muslims’, ‘Immigration’, ‘Middle East’, and ‘South Asia’. They are merged with the personal characteristics of MPs (x) – a religious background, party parliamentary status and a constituency type, whereas a legislative role is used as a control. Explanatory variables are dichotomised for the statistical analysis. The dataset is declared to be time series cross-sectional (TSCS) data.

Secondly, a series of Prais-Winsten regression models with standard errors search and cluster robust inference examine how religious background, types of constituency (minority or non-minority) and party parliamentary status affect the frequency of references to minority issues in WPQs.⁴ The models are identity-centred and account for the effect of having a certain religious background on the frequency of raising minority issues, alongside the most relevant institutional predictors. They exclude less relevant characteristics, including party identification, electoral characteristics, gender, and ethnicity. The last two are omitted from the analysis because of collinearity and a lack of ethnic variation within each of the religious groups (i.e. Jewish parliamentarians are predominantly White, and Muslim MPs have South Asian ethnic backgrounds).

Finally, the study tests the impact of a religious minority background, constituency type and party parliamentary status – whilst controlling for the effect of legislative role – on the

Muslims’, ‘Middle East’, ‘South Asia’, and ‘Immigration’. The indicators are compiled from the materials collected from the Government-funded institutions, such as the Commission for Equality and Human Rights, non-governmental organisations and faith communities.

⁴ The *prais* command uses the Prais-Winsten estimator and iterates until the parameter estimates converge. The Durbin-Watson test is reported for both the original and the transformed models, which suits the data due its nonscalar residual variance matrices (Beckett, 2013).

likelihood of referring to minority issues in WPQs in a series of random-effect logistic (Gaussian) models conducted on dichotomised dependent and independent variables. The hypotheses are tested using a series of random-effect logistic models. Random effects models are preferred to fixed effects models, because the unobserved effect is uncorrelated with each explanatory variable. Additionally, the main explanatory variables – a religious minority background and the party parliamentary status – are either constant over time or change infrequently. Finally, a random effects model is preferred to fixed effects and is more efficient in the pooled logistic regression, which is used in this analysis (Woodridge, 2013). The models are similar to the Prais-Winsten models, but the dependent variables are dichotomised for the purpose of the analysis. The dichotomised technique is used to compensate for the unbalanced nature of the panel, which is the result of the uneven length of parliamentary presence of the MPs in the House. Using logistic regressions allows estimating the likelihood of raising minority issues, rather than the intensity with which it is done.

II. Results

2.1 Do minority MPs ask disproportionately more WPQs on minority issues?

The regression analyses demonstrate that Members of Parliament from minority backgrounds do not refer to the issues of concern for the respective minority more frequently than MPs from a different background and show no statistically significant impact from having a religious minority background on the frequency of raising minority issues in WPQs. In fact, the only results significant in statistical terms are a negative relationship between having a Muslim minority background and the frequency of referring to the issues of concern for British Jews, and a negative relationship between not having a minority background and the frequency of referring to British Muslims and immigration (Figure 1).

Figure 1 about here⁵

Although the coefficient is rather weak (-0.150), it demonstrates that Muslim parliamentarians rarely ask questions relevant to the Jewish community, whereas MPs with a Jewish background and non-minority Members occasionally refer to issues relating to anti-Semitism and the Holocaust,⁶ though the frequency of references when regressed against a religious background is not significant. WPQs tabled by Muslim and Jewish parliamentarians on issues of concern to British Muslims occur as rarely, though cover a wider range of topics, including Islamic clothing and dietary requirements,⁷ religious tolerance and the alleged radicalisation of the UK's Muslim communities.⁸ However, neither Jewish nor Muslim politicians raise issues of concern to a respective minority group disproportionately more frequently, compared with MPs with a different background.

⁵ Figure 1 shows 15 coefficients from Prais-Winsten AR(1) regressions conducted on dichotomised IVs – Jewish, Muslim and non-minority backgrounds – and continuous DVs – British Jewry, British Muslims, Immigration, Middle East and South Asia. The coefficients – dots – show average effects of having a Jewish, Muslim or non-minority background on the number of references to these minority issues. The farther the dot is placed from the line through zero, the stronger the effect is. If the dot is on the right side of the line, the effect is positive, and it is negative if it is on its left side. If the line for the 95% confidence intervals crosses the line through zero the effect is not statistically significant.

⁶ E.g., 134527 in Hansard 2000; 38664 in Hansard 2006.

⁷ E.g., 130949 in Hansard 2000.

⁸ For instance, Dr Julian Lewis made requests about the Islamic Society of Britain and its alleged links with Muslim extremist organisations, especially those involved in anti-Zionist activity (14781, 14843 in Hansard 2002). A number of individual cases, such as the detention of a Palestinian activist Sheikh Raed Salah in 2011, grasped the attention of Members too (65761, 65762, 65763, 65764 in Hansard 2012).

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3 However, despite the absence of positive, statistically significant effects from Jewish and
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5 Muslim backgrounds on the frequency of referring to issues of concern for their respective
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7 minority groups, the analysis also shows that non-minority MPs are raising topics relating to
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9 British Muslims and immigration disproportionately less frequently. This can be the result of
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11 their genuine lack of interest and/or expertise on these minority issues.
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14 The analyses also show that the proportion of minority population in a constituency does not
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16 affect MPs' frequency of asking minority-specific WPQs. It is not to be expected that an MP
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18 who represents a constituency with a high proportion of religious minority population will
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20 necessarily engage with the interests of those minorities on the floor of the House.
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22 Furthermore, the absence of a statistically significant relationship between the frequency of
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24 engagement with minority issues of MPs representing constituencies with minority and non-
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26 minority populations might signify that there is no variation at all. This indicates either a lack
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28 of MPs' engagement with minority issues, or the consistency of MPs' interest regardless of
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30 the minority presence in their constituencies.
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34 There are, however, significant differences between the frequency with which Members of
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36 the Government and Opposition parliamentary parties table WPQs on the issues of minority
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38 concern. This is illustrated in Figure 2, which shows a series of regression coefficients that
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40 demonstrates how the party parliamentary status influences the frequency of raising minority
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42 issues in WPQs. In particular, it shows consistently strong, positive, statistically significant
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44 effects from being in Opposition on the frequency of references to immigration and British
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46 Muslims in WPQs by MPs from Jewish, Muslim and non-minority backgrounds.
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Figure 2 about here⁹

The high frequency of references to immigration in Parliamentary Questions is a reflection of the growing concern over the issue among the public (Migration Observatory, 2011; YouGov, 2013). It also echoes the parliamentary debate and the scrutiny of such legislative proposals as the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill, the Asylum and Immigration Bill, the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Bill, and the UK Borders Bill. The results suggest that non-minority and Jewish parliamentarians have made a substantial contribution to these debates, whereas Muslim politicians engage with these issues less frequently.

Furthermore, Figure 2 demonstrates moderately strong, positive, statistically significant effects from being in Opposition on the probability of referring to British Muslims (0.913, 0.941, and 0.918 for Jewish, Muslims and non-minority MPs, respectively). The thematic analysis of WPQs shows that issues raised in WPQs in relation to British Muslims and immigration often overlap and speak to each other. In particular, both debates address multicultural policies and the problem of socio-political inclusion of migrant-origin groups, including British Muslims.

Overall, being in Opposition gives positive and statistically significant results for the frequency of referring to British Muslims and immigration by MPs from all identity groups. On the other hand, with the only exception of the British Jewry, there is no observable effect from a religious minority background on the frequency of referring to minority issues in WPQs. This suggests that the partisan nature of Parliamentary Questions and their

⁹ Figure 2 shows 15 coefficients from Prais-Winsten AR(1) regressions conducted on dichotomised IVs – being in Opposition/Government – and continuous DVs – British Jewry, British Muslims, Immigration, Middle East, and South Asia. The coefficients – represented as black circles – show average effects of being in Opposition on the number of references to these minority issues.

parliamentary functions outweighs religious background as a predictor of behaviour, even when the party discipline is loosened.

2.2 *Are minority MPs more likely to raise minority issues in WPQs at all?*

The logistic regressions on TSCS data demonstrate the effect of having a religious minority background on the likelihood of asking a minority-specific Parliamentary Question, whilst accounting for other institutional predictors. The results largely confirm those of the frequency analysis and suggest the superiority of the institutional, rather than identity-centred, explanations. Figure 3 summarises a series of logistic regression coefficients that demonstrate the effects of having a Jewish, Muslim and non-minority background on the likelihood of referring to minority issues in WPQs.

Figure 3 about here¹⁰

It shows relatively strong, positive, statistically significant effects from a Muslim background on the likelihood of referring to Muslim-related foreign affairs, including South Asia and the Middle East, in WPQs. Muslim MPs are twice as likely as those from a non-Muslim background to table WPQs on these issues. The strength of their interest in foreign, rather than internal community, topics speaks to the argument of the ‘securitisation’ of minority issues (DeHanas *et al.*, 2010). Then, Muslim MPs are expected to engage with security issues and reflect on various aspects of minority operations in WPQs. Instead, the qualitative

¹⁰ Figure 3 represents 15 coefficients from the random-effects logistic (Gaussian) regressions conducted on dichotomised DVs – British Jewry, British Muslims, Immigration, Middle East, and South Asia – and IVs – having a Jewish, Muslim or non-minority background. The coefficients – circles – show average effects of having a Jewish, Muslim or non-minority background on the probability of referring to these minority issues.

analysis of the questions suggests that Muslim MPs mostly focus on development and humanitarian cooperation with South Asian countries, cultural issues and the human rights situation in the area rather than the UK's military presence in the Middle East.¹¹

Occasionally, however, they reflect on the post-war reconstruction and humanitarian situation in the region,¹² as well as the treatment of UK citizens in the Middle East.¹³

Overall, the impact of having a religious minority background on the likelihood of raising minority issues in WPQs is limited to Muslim parliamentarians asking WPQs on foreign affairs, which partially supports H₁. The effect from having a Jewish background, on the other hand, is irrelevant as a predictor of MPs' engagement with minority issues, as well as having a Muslim background that does not influence the likelihood of MPs referring to the UK's domestic communities, immigration, and the inter-faith dialogue.

Although representing a constituency with a significant minority population is expected to increase the likelihood of MPs' engagement with the issues of minority concern, the analyses does not give any positive results. This rejects H₂ and suggests that the partisan nature of WPQs could outweigh the effect of representing a seat with a significant minority presence. This is supported by the results of testing H₃, whereby being a member of an Opposition party, are the strongest predictors of the likelihood of engagement with minority issues in WPQs. The analyses that support H₃ are illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4 about here¹⁴

¹¹ E.g., 19875 in Hansard 2012.

¹² E.g., 87792 in Hansard 2012.

¹³ E.g., 100895 in Hansard 2012.

¹⁴ Figure 4 represents 15 coefficients from the random-effects logistic (Gaussian) regressions conducted on dichotomised DVs – British Jewry, British Muslims, Immigration, Middle East, and South Asia – and IVs –

Figure 4 shows consistently strong, positive, statistically significant effects from being in Opposition on the likelihood of referring to British Muslims, immigration and foreign affairs, including the Middle East and South Asia, in the WPQs by MPs from Jewish, Muslim and non-minority backgrounds. Being in Opposition is statistically significant not only for the likelihood of MPs from Jewish, Muslim and non-minority backgrounds referring to the British Jewry in WPQs.¹⁵ In all the cases the effects are strong, positive and comparable across Jewish, Muslim and non-minority MPs. This means that being in Opposition significantly increases the likelihood of asking questions in relation to the Muslim minority, immigration, the Middle East and South Asia. This interest has been consistent throughout the period of the study, and the increase in references after the invasion of Iraq and the London bombings are not significant. This suggests that those questions were not an ad-hoc reaction to certain events, but rather the routine scrutiny of relevant policies and legislation. Immigration, as the most partisan of the minority issues, illustrates the strength and consistency of the effect of being in Opposition on the frequency and the likelihood of tabling Parliamentary Questions on the issue by minority and non-minority MPs. The qualitative analysis of the content of these questions also reflects on immigration. For instance, MPs

being in Opposition/Government. The coefficients – circles – show average effects of being in Opposition on the probability of referring to these minority issues.

¹⁵ The likelihood of referring to the British Jewry is not significantly affected by MPs being in Opposition or Government, whereas holding a leadership role has a negative, statistically significant effect on the probability of referring to issues relating to the British Jewry in WPQs tabled by MPs from Jewish, Muslim and non-minority backgrounds. This is likely to be the result of the sensitivity and narrowness of the topic, which is too specialised to attract the attention of frontbenchers who usually engage with broader issues (Searing, 1994, p. 371), as well as the cross-party consensus on combating anti-Semitism that reduces the differences in the content of WPQs tabled by the MPs from the Opposition and the Government parties.

regularly question the efficiency and responsiveness of the Home Office and the other migration authorities and evaluate their performance,¹⁶ as well as the costs of the administrative and legal support, the police and detention services, and the welfare systems.¹⁷ They frequently express concerns over potential flaws in immigration regulations,¹⁸ and loopholes for the discrimination of migrants – especially in the context of the stop-and-search police operations and access to work and the welfare system.¹⁹ Additionally, politicians use Parliamentary Questions for requesting statistical data, including the number of refugees and asylum seekers, labour migrants, dependants, family members and foreign nationals, who had leave to remain as well as updates on illegal immigration and statistics on migrants detained, deported and those who appealed their cases.²⁰

The strength and consistency of the effects also highlights the partisan nature of WPQs. Tabling WPQs is considered to be a low-cost parliamentary activity that can hardly damage one's career or prospects for promotion. However, it is highly instrumental in both holding the Executive to account and promoting the party's agenda. This makes WPQs more visible to the general public and more partisan. In this study, the effect of the dichotomy between the Government and the Opposition clearly outweighs the impact of having a religious minority background. As a result, the likelihood of asking minority-specific WPQs by Jewish, Muslim and non-minority MPs is rather similar. A lack of variation across MPs from Jewish, Muslim and non-minority backgrounds suggests the strong Government/Opposition bias affecting the content of the questions.

¹⁶ E.g., 72081 in Hansard 2012.

¹⁷ E.g., 72823 in Hansard 2012.

¹⁸ E.g., 5280 in Hansard 2002.

¹⁹ E.g., 28291 in Hansard 1997-98; 73336 in Hansard 2005-06.

²⁰ E.g., 130841 in Hansard 1999-00; 239060 in Hansard 2008-09.

The analyses of maximum likelihood support and strengthen the evidence from the regression analyses and suggest that institutional factors, especially being in the Government/Opposition party, are stronger and more consistent predictors of engagement with minority issues than an MP's religious minority background and the proportion of a minority population in his/her constituency. However, Muslim parliamentarians have been more likely to engage with foreign affairs, which supports the argument regarding the securitisation of minority issues in UK political debate (DeHanas *et al.*, 2010).

III. Conclusion

The analyses show that Jewish and Muslim parliamentarians do not table disproportionately more questions on issues of concern to respective minorities than MPs with a different religious background (Figure 1). Neither Jewish nor Muslim background affects the likelihood of raising questions of internal community concern and, in the case of a Jewish background, the likelihood of engagement with all minority issues. Muslim MPs, on the other hand, are more likely to table questions about South Asia and the Middle East (Figure 3). Their interest in foreign affairs speaks to the argument of the securitisation of minority issues (DeHanas *et al.*, 2010), though the content of the WPQs tabled by Muslim parliamentarians hints that they are more interested in human rights and development than in security issues. Overall, a religious minority background as a predictor of MPs' engagement with minority issues is inferior to institutional factors, especially being a member of the Opposition party. Being in Opposition has a strong and consistent effect on the frequency of raising immigration-related issues in WPQs and the likelihood of asking minority-specific Parliamentary Questions by MPs from minority and non-minority backgrounds (Figures 2 and 4). The strength and consistency of the relationship between being in Opposition and asking questions on British Muslims, immigration and foreign affairs reflects the partisan

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2
3 nature of Parliamentary Questions driven by the dichotomy between the Government and the
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5 Opposition and the adversarial nature of inter-party relations.
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8 The results of the content and statistical analyses also paint immigration as one of the most
9
10 referred to and partisan topics in WPQs. A strong, positive, significant effect from being in
11
12 Opposition on the frequency and the likelihood of asking questions on immigration by MPs
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14 from Jewish, Muslim and non-minority backgrounds suggest that WPQs on immigration are
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16 used to interrogate and scrutinise relevant Government's policies rather than reflect
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18 individual identities (Figures 2 and 4). Being in Opposition also increases the likelihood of
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20 MPs asking WPQs about British Muslims, South Asia and the Middle East. The first topic is
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22 a reflection of the multiculturalism and community cohesion debate, whereas their interest in
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24 foreign affairs demonstrates their engagement with debates and inquiries into the campaigns
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26 in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations (Figure 4).
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30 To summarise, the high impact of being in Opposition on the frequency and the likelihood of
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32 referring to minority issues in WPQs reflects on functions of Parliamentary Questions, which
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34 aim at probing and scrutinising the Government (Hansard, 2010a; Hansard, 2012a). Unlike
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36 these institutional factors, having a Jewish and Muslim background is largely irrelevant as a
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38 predictor of raising minority issues. The consistent dominance of institutional factors
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40 suggests that Jewish and Muslim parliamentarians are not more likely to engage with
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42 minority issues in Parliamentary Questions, or do so more frequently than politicians with a
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44 different minority background, despite relatively low risks for their political careers and
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46 fewer institutional constraints on WPQs compared to whipped parliamentary activities.
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Table 1 Number of WPQs tabled by MPs by Members’ religious background, type of constituency, party parliamentary status

	1997-01	2001-05	2005-10	2010-12	Total
Religious background					
Jewish MPs	5,378	16,039	13,880	4,580	39,877
Muslim MPs	185	95	246	1,872	2,398
Non-minority MPs	4,101	2,844	2,791	2,112	11,848
Constituency type					
Minority	2,771	3,781	5,893	4,517	16,962
Non-minority	6,893	15,197	11,024	4,047	37,161
Party parliamentary status					
Government	3,876	4,163	4,133	3,068	15,240
Opposition	5,788	14,815	12,784	5,496	38,883

Source: Hansard 1998-2012

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Figure 3 Effect of religious background on the likelihood of raising minority issues in WPQs

Figure 4 Effect of being in Opposition on the likelihood of raising minority issues in WPQs

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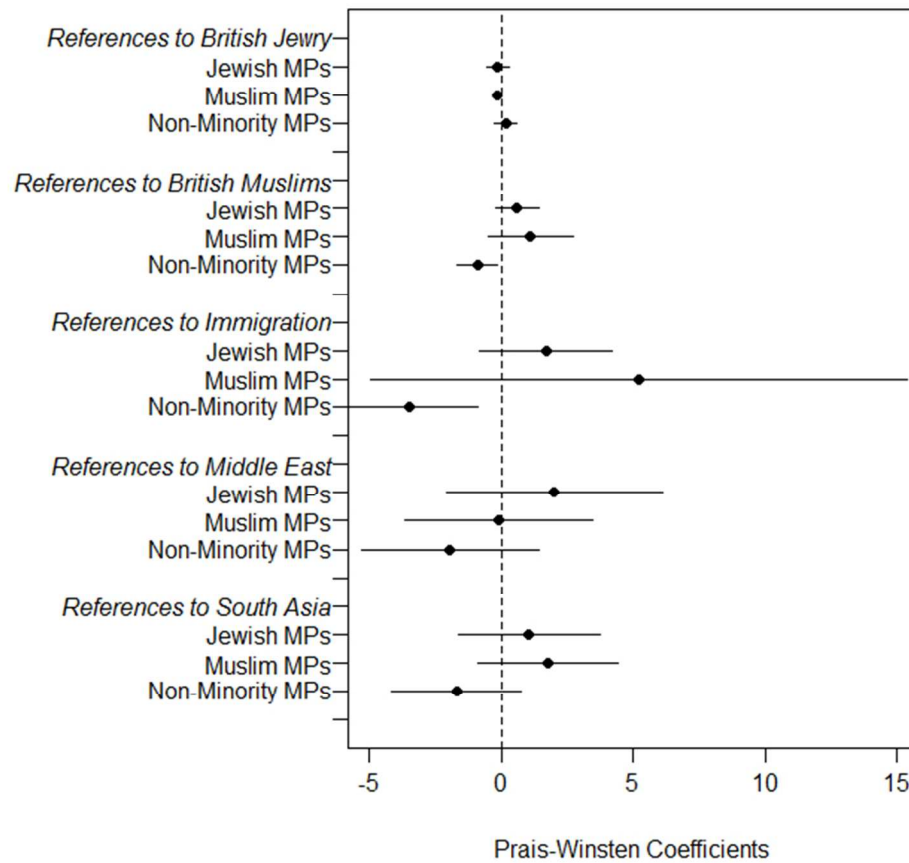
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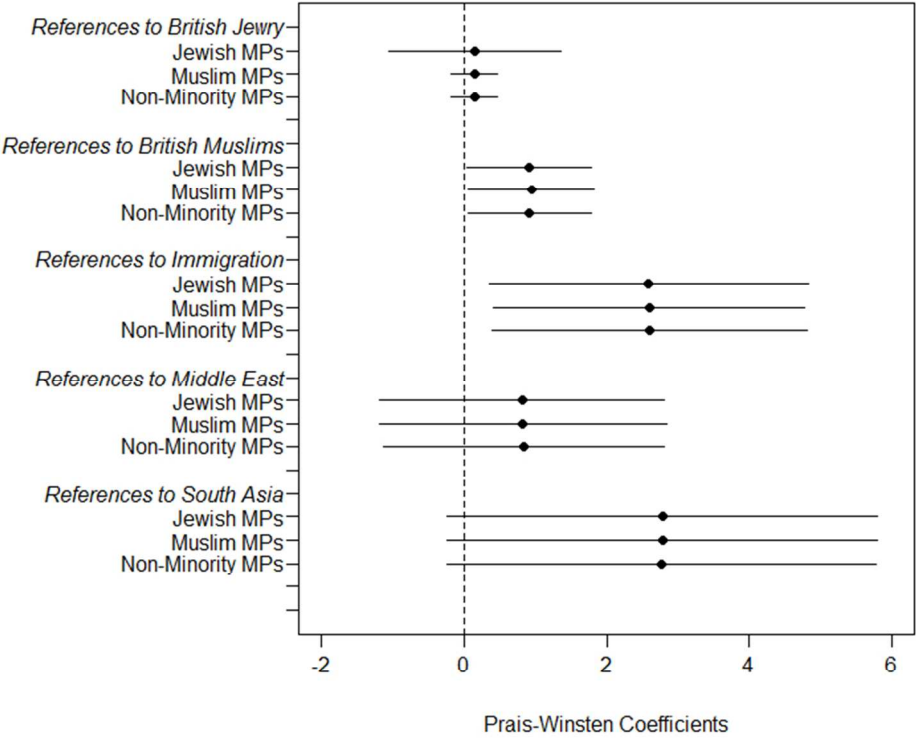
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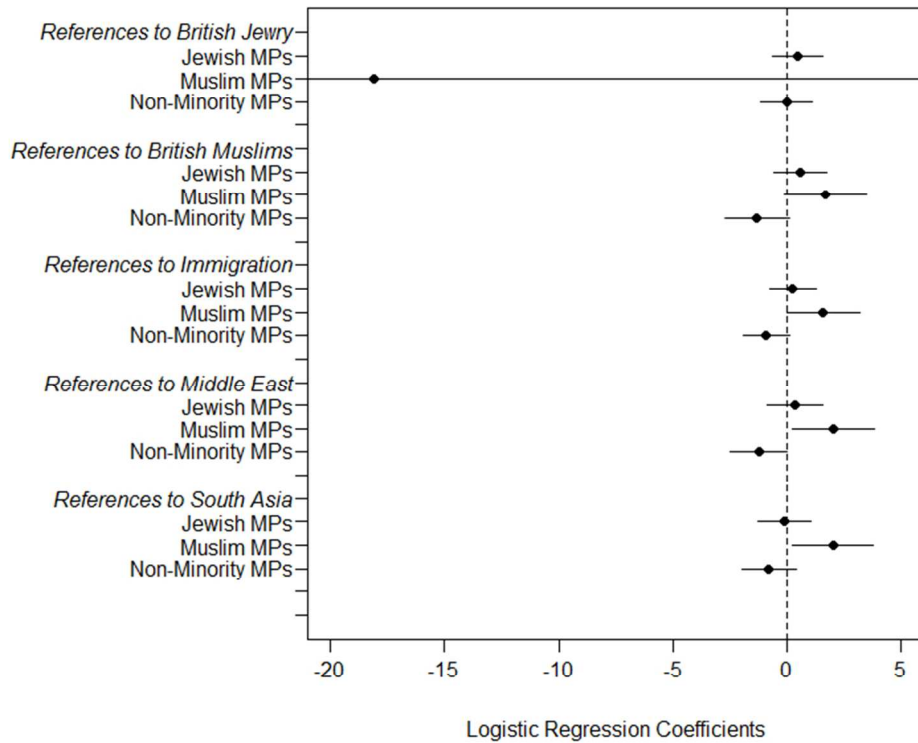


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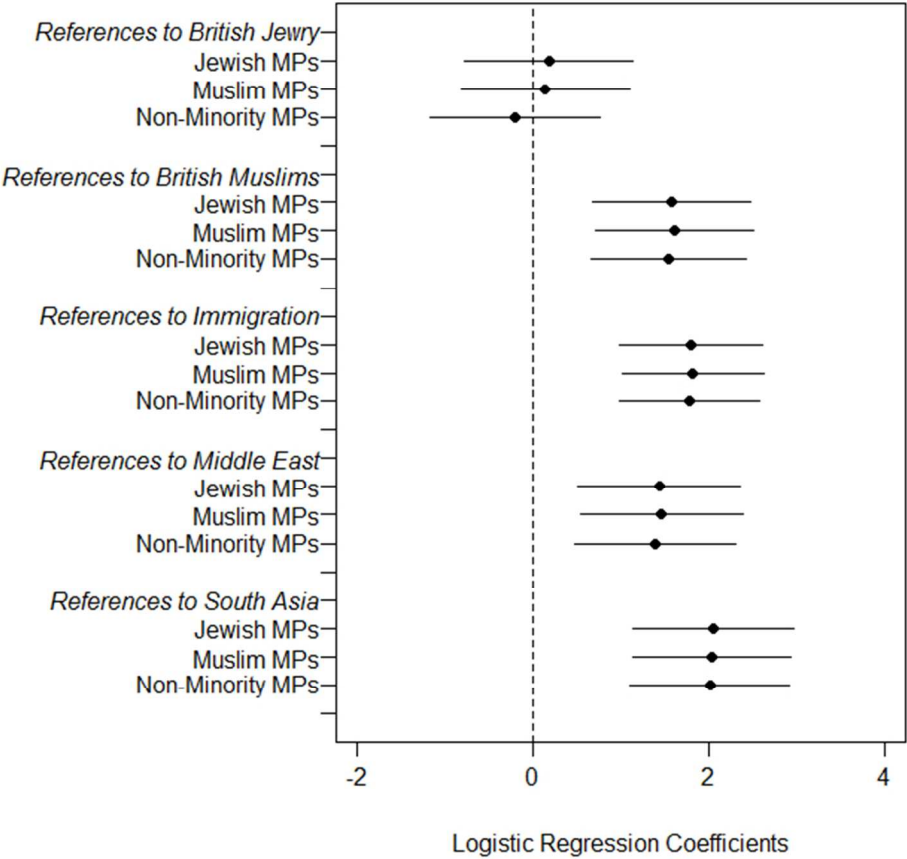




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